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ABSTRACT

The Hartford Project Concern attempted to discover if the educational deficits so persistent among minority group inner city children can be prevented or corrected by placement in a suburban school. Two hundred and sixty six were randomly selected by classroom units from those schools with 85 percent or more non-white population and were reassigned on a chance basis to vacant seats in 124 different classrooms in 34 suburban schools in five suburban communities. A control group of 305 was selected in an identical fashion. During each of the four terms between Fall 1966 and Spring 1968 each child was given a battery of tests under identical conditions. Teacher reports, interviews, etc. were also utilized. The overall pattern of differences between experimental and controls indicates that programs, if begun in suburban schools by grade 3, can influence experimentals toward better understanding of expectations, i.e., better test-taking skill, increased self-discipline, and increased ability to evaluate responses in terms of external standards. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (JM)

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Changes in cognitive style: an analysis of the impact of white suburban schools on inner city children.*

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In September, 1966, the City of Hartford, Connecticut, joined with five affluent suburban communities in what was then a unique venture: could the educational deficits so persistent among minority group inner city children be prevented and/or corrected by placement in a suburban school? This paper reports on one aspect of that general question: what measurable changes in cognitive style occur after two years of suburban placement? The broader issue, of course, has deep political and social implications, but the emphasis here is on the educational problem that confronts school psychology in both subtle and dramatic forms throughout the country. That problem may be summarized as the viability of the public school as a stimulus for growth and development for non-middle class youngsters.

The Hartford experience, known as Project Concern, developed from an honest acceptance of three sets of data: 1) the clear cut evidence that most disadvantaged youngsters in the inner city schools were failing to respond effectively to their school environment; 2) the efforts - some quite sophisticated and expensive - to compensate for and correct this situation by way of

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smaller classes, better teachers, new curricula, special service personnel, and new physical facilities had met with extremely minimal success; 3) the changing demography of the city called for urgency since at the time of the initiation of the program the city schools were over 56% non-white (i.e., Black or Spanish-speaking). In the face of these issues a break from the tradition of "more of the same" seemed indicated. The decision to pursue the concept of the suburban school as an effective intervention was based upon a rather simple rationale. Three assumptions can summarize it adequately: 1) response patterns are most likely to change when the environmental conditions (physical, psychological, and social) are markedly different from those typically encountered; 2) as old response patterns are found ineffective, the evolving new patterns will develop in the direction of models presented by the peer group, provided such models do not create disabling anxiety or pose unattainable goals; 3) teacher expectations can be consistently higher (and therefore more effective) when the classroom situation provides feedback to the teacher in terms of adequate goal attainment by a majority of the students. In this light, it is important to emphasize that the concept of integrated education is seen as a central aspect of the attempt to intensify the educational experience for all youngsters by providing a confrontation (or, at least, an association) with the different, but the focus of this report is on changes in the inner city children.

Similarly, two related questions demand brief comment. The frequent argument over the inferiority of the city school seems somewhat irrelevant; the position of the authors is that city school carries an impossible burden in terms of the goals desired. Secondly, the issue of the appropriateness of the traditional school and its curricula to inner city minority group children is viewed as a highly critical question, but while it is being explored in terms of alternatives it seems equally important to provide youngsters with educational experiences that open possibilities rather than impose further constraints in terms of the general society's expectations.

The political and sociological problems, intriguing as they are, which were encountered in the initiation phase will not be discussed here. Eventually five suburban communities agreed to take a total of 266 children in grades K-5. These children were then <u>randomly</u> selected by classroom units from those schools in Hartford with 85% or more non-white population and were re-assigned on a chance basis to vacant seats in the suburban schools. In all, these children were placed in 34 different schools and 124 different classrooms. In addition, a control group of 305 inner city children remaining in the city schools was selected in an identical fashion. A cursory glimpse at the characteristics of the experimental group suggests that they do indeed resemble the patterns associated with the urban disadvantaged. 50% come from one parent homes; 76% have four or more siblings; 76% of the parents were born in the South or in the Islands; over 30% of the families depend entirely upon welfare payments for support.

The procedures followed in the data gathering process were comprehensive, but rather traditional. At four points in time (Fall, 1966; Spring; 1967; Fall, 1967; Spring, 1968) each child (experimental and control) was given a battery of tests under identical conditions. In addition, teacher reports, anecdotal material, behavioral reports and interviews were utilized. The results to be presented are based upon analyses of the following instruments: WISC Verbal Scale; Rorschach; Test of Primary Mental Abilities; General Anxiety Scale; Test Anxiety Scale; Metropolitan Readiness Test (grades K and 1 only); Reading and Mathematics Achievement Tests (grades 3-5). An overview of the results derived from analyses of covariance and t tests shows that the experimental youngsters in grades K-3 had significantly different (and higher) scores on measures of mental ability and achievement generally. These results are reported in some detail by Mahan (1968, pp. 20-25). Of interest now is not so much the gross improvement as the shift in pattern or style. Since little measurable difference (either in terms of overall or pattern change) was found at grades 4 and 5, the discussion applies to the four lower grades.

The areas of major growth for the experimental in comparison with the controls are as follows:

1) Increased verbal facility both in oral communication and in response to standardized tests.

2) Perceptual, space and motor skills show a development that is closely correlated with the verbal development.

3) The ability to see (or, at least, express) verbal relationships and to categorize verbal concepts shows significant relative growth.

4) On the Rorshach the number of responses, the breadth of categories and the form level all increase significantly while rejections, perseverations and pure color responses are all significantly decreased.

Equally important are the following areas wherein the experimentals showed no significant growth over the controls:

1) Numerical skills were not accelerated and they tended to be as much retarded by national norms as were verbal skills in the initial testing.

2) There is no decrease in anxiety level on either measure (GASC or TASC) for either group; and for both groups the measured anxiety level is significantly higher than for the groups reported by Sarason et al. (1960, p. 351)

3) There is no measured difference between the groups in their expression of understanding of social expectations or of judgment involving common sense.

This overall pattern of differences between experimentals and controls gives some base for the expectation that the suburban school can have a direct impact upon the cognitive functioning of the inner city ghetto child so long as it is begun at an early grade (not later than grade 3 in the present instance). The direction of this impact is toward greater verbal productivity, increased accuracy in the associative and sorting processes, and

an enhanced willingness to take a risk in terms of verbal responses to situations. In other words, there are indications that there is a tendency toward better understanding of expectations (i.e., better test-taking skill), increased self-discipline, and increased ability to evaluate responses in terms of external standards.

These changes are clearly in the direction of improved ability to fulfill the role of "pupil" in the modern school. They do not seem to have been achieved at any measured loss of vitality or expressiveness; in fact, the opposite seems more likely. The controls show little flexibility on these test-oriented tasks and it appears that there is increasing rigidity and stereotypy with age for this group. The opposite is true for the experimentals.

In the last analysis these results, although based upon a small sample and subject to replication, have profound implications for school psychology. In the first instance, they point up the potency of environmental factors in the learning situation as determinants of outcome. Beyond this, they underline the importance of the peer group in the learning process and present an important perspective on the issues of homogeneous groups and neighborhood schools which may well be vehicles for stability rather than change and growth. In addition, they call for a combination of clinical and socio-psychological skills in the functioning of the school psychologist who, if he is to be a facilitator of development, must be skilled in the assessment of the interaction between individual and total institution. The present study suggests that in many instances the structure, organization and

ethos of the institution may be the major problem - and the intervention of the psychologist as an institutional change agent as well as an individual change agent demanded.

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